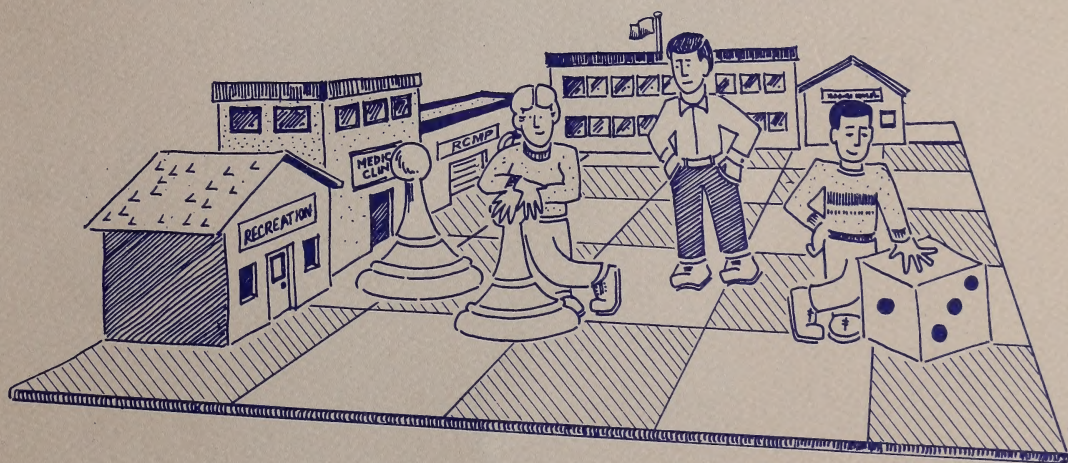


# Interagency Co-ordination Handbook



NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL





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The members of the Northern Alberta Development Council are pleased to present this handbook for use by northern residents.

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## *To the reader*

In many of the communities of northern Alberta there often seems to be a problem finding enough resources to deliver human services. Counsellors, social workers, police, teachers, doctors and nurses, are usually stretched to their limit doing their job. And yet, there is always a call for more help. One solution to the problem has been **interagency co-ordination**, a “meeting of the minds”, a “pooling of resources” to meet a human need.

During a recent study on **Alcoholism: Strategies for Northern Alberta**, sponsored by the Northern Alberta Development Council, researchers visited 17 northern Alberta communities and heard from over 700 people. They were told many times that there was a need for better interagency co-operation and co-ordination in each community. Furthermore, it was said that community agencies needed some guidelines to direct their co-ordination efforts.

If you are concerned that many of the organizations providing services in your community do not work together closely enough, and that this affects the quality of service provided in your community, you may wish to consider developing some kind of interagency co-ordinating group. This handbook is designed to give you some helpful hints in organizing and operating such a group. If there is a co-ordinating group already operating in your community, the handbook can provide some suggestions to strengthen its work.

There are two points you should know before you read this handbook. Firstly, there are many ways to go about building a co-ordinating group and many ways to operate it. Each approach will require the hard work of a number of committed community members. A situation of trust and mutual respect must be developed and maintained or co-ordination will not be achieved. The approach selected must also be adjusted as the issues and conditions change in the community.

Secondly, this handbook will not tell you everything you need to know in creating or running a successful co-ordinating group. It will point you in important directions and will give you a good start. Like any handbook, it is best used as a resource suited to your purposes. Some ideas you may accept, some you may reject and others you may adapt to your own situation. Use only the ideas that seem appropriate to your unique community needs.







# *What are the human services in your community?*

Many of the services in a community are provided by governments through specialized agencies. Some services are provided by non-government groups who may have some affiliation with a larger organization. Service delivery is provided regularly by paid staff, sometimes with the support of volunteers, who either live in the community or visit regularly.



Human services are those that community members turn to when they are in need. Workers in these services are usually seen as “helpers” or “helping professionals” and the person receiving the service is seen as a “client” or a “person-in-need”. Some of the human services include: child protection, public health care, hospital treatment, mental health care, family life education, life skills education, employment training, juvenile services, medical care, safety and protection, and counselling of all kinds. The workers involved include people such as: social workers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, policemen, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, teachers, therapists, firemen, community workers and clergy.

Some government services, or those largely funded by government, are directed by community boards who have the responsibility to set policy, monitor and prepare budgets, hire and fire staff and generally see to it that the prescribed service is provided. Typical community board-run operations include: hospitals, public health units, schools, recreation facilities and various community support services. Non-government services, such as the United Way, usually have boards or committees that guide them and monitor their operations.

Altogether, these services form a network that serves the entire community. Like all networks the component services are interdependent. The services need the clients and the clients need the services. Less apparent but equally important is that the services need each other in order to do their job more effectively. Individually and collectively the services seek to correct any serious problems that arise, redirect their resources to service gaps and bring these gaps to the attention of those responsible.



# What is co-ordination?

Co-ordination is an active effort requiring the combining of different elements in order to achieve a positive result. It includes the idea that people work together by informing each other about their work and by meshing their activities so that both client and community needs are met in a more holistic or complete way.

Interagency co-ordination can be the casual meeting of two service staff, discussing a common issue or problem over a cup of coffee. It can also be a scheduled session of service representatives with a defined topic of discussion. It could be a case conference to discuss a particular client. In any event it is a formal or informal meeting of service staff who are there largely at their own choosing and in the belief that the meeting will improve their service.

*If interagency co-ordination is functioning well, these characteristics will be evident:*

- *there is no control by any one person or agency;*
- *co-operation rather than coercion is practiced by all members;*
- *all members agree on a common goal or goals;*
- *members believe that their own service is improved by the joint venture;*
- *service problems can be freely raised for discussion;*
- *there is a high degree of information sharing;*
- *each member has a responsibility to the group; and*
- *each member periodically assumes certain tasks that come out of the meeting.*





## *Do your community services need co-ordination?*

This is a crucial question. Perhaps services are well-delivered in your community. Perhaps the leadership and staff of the various agencies work well together. Perhaps they keep in touch informally through phone calls, lunches, social meetings, visits or over coffee at home. Perhaps the various formal contacts between workers through classes, workshops, speakers, professional meetings and working sessions are sufficient.

There may, however, be situations where agencies fall short in the way they provide services in the community. Most agencies have internal mechanisms to assist in maintaining standards and focus. But when the regular co-ordinating mechanisms fail to keep pace with changing conditions, extra assistance may have to be provided. If one service cannot adequately perform its work, it creates spinoff effects which will tax all other related services. Other service workers and clients may become aware of service breakdown but often do not know what to do about it.

You might discuss the question with others in your community to see if your sentiments are similar to those expressed in numerous research surveys — that generally there is a strong need for co-ordination.

A common problem for northern Alberta community services personnel is isolation and burn-out from overwork. The workers may lack opportunities to “compare notes” with other resource people and to update themselves on current developments in human service delivery. A way around this problem is for the services to band together and set up short, common programs of study for local service people. Every community can access government departments which will provide excellent resource material and personnel. Interagency groups create an excellent vehicle to deliver the instruction.



*Some warning signs which may indicate a need for co-ordination are:*

- *people complaining publicly about particular services;*
- *people asking for services which already exist;*
- *a number of community members going to several agencies seeking help;*
- *several workers from different agencies serving the same family for different reasons (people in need often have more than one problem and often have dealings with more than one service);*
- *open conflict between various "helping" workers;*
- *government officials inside and outside the community being contacted concerning services;*
- *tragedies occurring in which a lack of service co-ordination becomes evident;*
- *your community being served almost exclusively by professionals who do not live there;*
- *staff having difficulty getting the in-service training needed;*
- *insufficient staff or financial resources to deal with a client's need;*
- *some services performing more inadequately than others;*
- *local service staff spending more time with head office than with the community;*
- *needs arising after regular business hours which cannot be addressed until the next day;*
- *service staff not communicating with each other;*
- *workload increasing dramatically possibly due to an unforeseen crisis;*
- *many agencies delivering similar services;*
- *service workers criticizing each other in public.*



## *Who should start the ball rolling?*

In a sense one can answer this question by saying — “anyone in the community who sees the need should act on it.”

While this is true, it is often directors or staff of government service agencies who first recognize the need and begin to work on a co-ordinating approach.

Experience indicates that the leadership to start the ball rolling usually comes from Family and Community Support

Services, Social Services, Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission, Public Health, the hospital or the police. Each of these groups has a broadly defined mandate to serve the community and each provides a wide range of services to community members. Even if the leadership does not come from these agencies, their assistance is needed to legitimize the co-ordinating activity and to make it comprehensive.



On occasion the pressure to develop a co-ordination approach comes from the service head office, some general government body such as the Northern Alberta Development Council or from a business group involved in a major industrial project. These outside forces generally serve the role of catalyst and can also serve to legitimize the importance of such a group.

The public-at-large can also take action and initiate interagency co-ordination. They do so by communicating their concerns and advice to a particular social service agency or to political leaders. Sometimes the point may be made in the media, such as a “Letter to the Editor”, a news article or a public broadcast on TV or radio.

Whoever takes the lead among the service agencies plays a crucial and responsible role. It becomes their responsibility to help develop a process so that co-ordination can occur. A sensitive approach must be taken, a sense of fair play maintained, and the lead agency, whether as meeting chairman or behind-the-scenes catalyst, must see that a positive tone is established.

# *How should you begin?*

If you have determined that some type of co-ordinating approach is needed in your community, you must first see if there are others that feel the same way. You should contact those involved in the other human services and ask their opinion. You should be aware of any existing arrangements used to co-ordinate services. You should also find out about any previous co-ordinating efforts that took place in your community.

Fundamentally, you need to develop a small working group that is appropriate to the service needs you see. The basic goal is not to change services or staff. It is to help agencies to work together more efficiently to meet client and community needs. This appears to be best done by extensive personal contact in informal settings. It is also better to begin with people who want to participate and who see the need for better co-ordination among the various services.

An early part of the work of this small group will need to be a documentation of experience where agencies may have worked at cross-purposes and, as a result, were unable to provide proper services. If this documentation is prepared in a factual non-threatening fashion, it will provide the basis for bringing more people into your group.

The first meeting of the core group should be relatively unstructured to permit a discussion of the "whys" and "wherefores". It should include the reasons for forming an interagency co-ordination group. Once your group has agreed upon its purpose, look over the list of reasons agreed to by everyone, and then discuss the issue of membership. At a future meeting, with a more complete membership, you can develop a more precise goals statement and begin to divide up tasks.





# *Who should be a member?*

This question often raises strong emotions both inside and outside the co-ordinating group. The membership defines the interagency to the community.

The interagency could include:

- anyone who provides a particular type of service;
- all services in the community;
- all the largest services or those with the largest budgets;
- only government services;
- only non-government services;
- only “professionals” defined as ...;
- only the community, not the region;
- only those involved in a particular problem or issue.

Many people believe that only smaller groups can be effective, say 5-15 people. Obviously larger group sessions are harder to arrange and the odds are greater for conflicting schedules. Furthermore, large groups do not allow for much personal recognition and interaction. It is harder to keep the interests of a large number of people. But if your purpose is broad and general, your group may need to be large. If your purpose and goals are specific then the membership may be smaller.

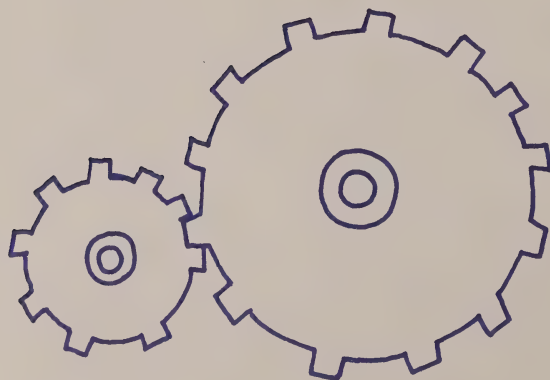
Experience indicates that most interagency groups seem to come together with no more than 15 people. However, there is one northern community of about 5,000 people which has a group of 40, while another community of 26,000 had an initial group of 6.

The message is that, with strong leadership and member interest, groups of varying size can work. However, **experience has shown it is best to begin small.**



Once you decide on your initial membership and the membership principle (which you will have to explain often) you will need to address the question of whom in the service you want. Will the interagency only be for service heads or only for operating staff, or both? Will you allow alternates or do you want specific people? Will you allow community members to participate or only service employees? Will board members be involved?

If the focus is on human services delivery, it is suggested that the following agencies be involved: Public Health, the hospital, Social Services, Mental Health, and Family and Community Support Services. It is also important that those in charge of these services play a lead role, and have informed back-up people when they are not available. You may decide to create a core interagency coordination committee with affiliate sub-committees made up of staff persons and other community workers who can address a specific goal or task. At some point the group may define different roles for members depending on the situation, the environment and the need.





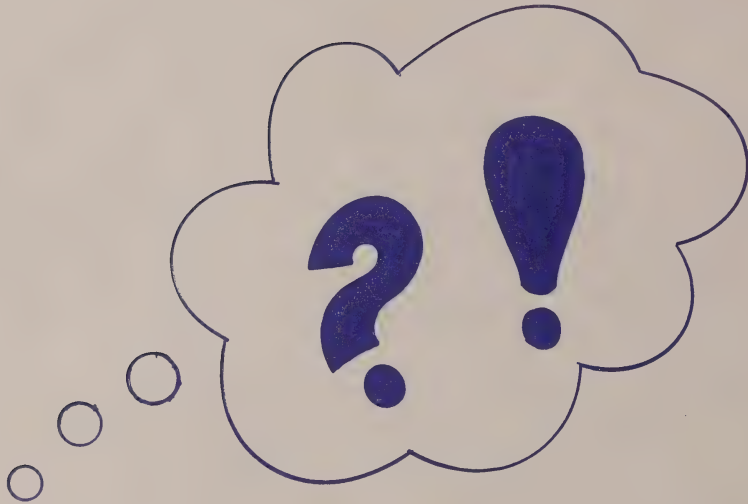
# *What should you call yourselves?*

Picking a name can be a frustrating task. To name something is to define it or at least to leave an impression about it. Once you name your interagency co-ordination group you have given the group a degree of permanency and formality. Some names recently used will illustrate the point and may help explain the debate over names.

- Task Force — assumes a goal and some mandate to move in a certain direction. The assembled group has a job to do and will disband when the job is done.
- Interagency — assumes only agencies participate and requires a definition of agency.
- Council — assumes some political power and some structure of proceedings.
- Committee — either a permanent or temporary gathering and usually small (less than 12 people). It is similar to a task force but its direction is more general and membership less restrictive.
- Assembly — a large gathering (more than 100 people) for information dissemination.
- Workshop — a meeting of interested persons for a short period of intensive study and discussion of a particular subject.
- Seminar — an intense course of study on issues under the direction of an instructor.
- Conference — a meeting of interested persons to discuss a particular subject.



The process of picking a name is more important than generally assumed. The debate over the name will reveal the ways you and your associates perceive your group and the way others will perceive you. There is an appropriate name for your group within the current community climate. Remember, names can be changed or can be given different meanings through your actions.





# *When and where do you meet?*

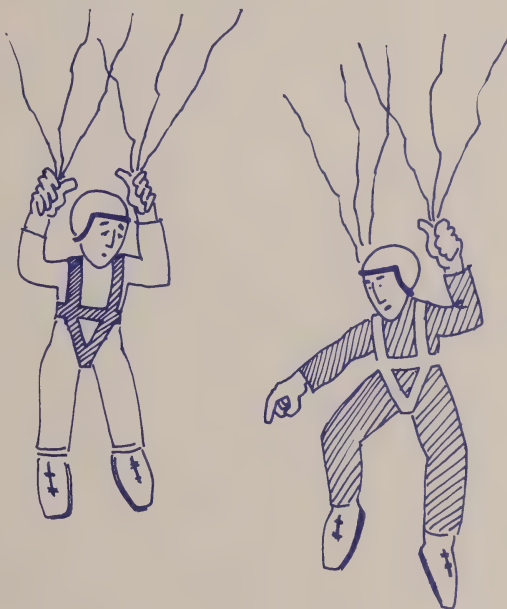
How often should you meet? While active people do not enjoy meeting “just to meet”, it is also very important to meet regularly; e.g., once a month. This will establish the group and help it build a solid base for interaction in between times and during emergencies.

A system also needs to be in place to meet more often when an issue arises that requires immediate attention. The group may also choose to use smaller working committees to prepare material for regular meetings. If this is done, the approach should be approved by the group.

It is important that meetings be brief, preferably no more than an hour or two. Participants also need to know well ahead of time when they will meet and how long meetings will last. Since they are active people, with many responsibilities, this information will help them plan their schedules. Such a practice will help eliminate the usual time-consuming activity of determining “when shall we meet next?” and “for how long?”.

Three principles should be kept in mind when deciding where to meet — **visibility, coverage and comfort**. Meet where group members can easily get to and can be comfortable. Make sure that some of the meetings take place in each agency’s community offices. Make sure there is room for everyone and space for smaller group sessions if necessary.

Even in small communities many service people are not familiar with the work settings of other agencies. It is important to know something about where people carry out their work and to allow service workers to meet and interact. Meetings in the various work places can indicate to staff that co-ordination is important. You also have the option of a mealtime meeting. As a rule you should not make a regular habit of meeting over a meal; eating can be a distraction to the discussion. Use this option only for small, informal gatherings, or special sessions where listening rather than discussion is required.



# *What should be your goals?*

Defining goals is one of the most important exercises an organization can undertake. Goals affect every aspect of a group's dynamics. Your membership, your decisions and your activities during and after meetings are all functions of your goals. How clearly members understand the goals determines in large part how successful your group will be.

Many goals are possible. It is important for the group to establish the most practical objectives with which they are most comfortable. Once the group begins to operate, more goals will likely be added. However, this should be done rather cautiously as it is better to reach a few well-defined objectives rather than trying to do all that is needed.



Your goals should answer the question, “why do we want to meet?”. There are a number of possible reasons for different service groups to regularly come together.

Some reasons for interagency meetings are:

- to discuss issues of mutual concern;
- to inform each other about mandates, procedures and programs;
- to introduce new staff;
- to assist with the identification of service problems;
- to assist with problem-solving;
- to provide a forum at which community service concerns can be aired;
- to respond to community crises;
- to conduct service-related research;
- to provide a support group for each other;
- to reduce any duplication of services;
- to lobby for needed programs;
- to respond for requests for information;
- to review the reasons for inter-service foul-ups;
- to relate to other community co-ordinating groups (e.g., the United Way);
- to organize interagency in-service training.



While members of an emerging interagency are setting goals, there could be some difficulty obtaining full support from all the “head offices” of the various local services. Usually this support is forthcoming, but occasionally an agency has difficulty explaining the “how’s” and “why’s” to their senior management. In addition, most services are constrained in determining who they serve and how they carry out their mandate. A key issue that emerges from these facts is that many workers or services cannot assign their responsibility or their authority to others. Thus, any co-ordinating group must operate within limits and operate on a more-or-less voluntary basis. Consequently, the goals tend to become limited, mutually-agreed-on ideals that service workers voluntarily pursue.

It is also advisable to seek support from each service’s head office so that the co-ordinating activities are legitimized. While government departments recognize the need for services to work together in any community, they may differ as to the importance they see in the activity and in the types of goals and issues which are appropriate for such a group. Regardless, the issue of relationships outside the community must be dealt with by each service head and must be understood by all co-ordinating group members. This understanding is important since the co-ordinating group is composed of services responsible to other levels of authority.

## *Who should chair the meetings?*



Many northern Alberta communities have had co-ordinating groups of some kind. While several groups are operating very successfully, others have either died or have moved into a dull routine. It is no easy task to bring diverse human service workers together on a consistent, constructive and interesting basis. For a group to be effective, a great deal of work is required.

Interagency meetings can be quite formal events or informal gatherings. Regardless of the degree of formality involved, the meetings will require some structure and guidance so that business can be effectively carried out. For this to happen, there must be good leadership at your meetings. It may, however, be difficult to find someone with the time, willingness and popular support to organize and chair meetings. This may be resolved in two ways. Firstly, some interagencies operate by rotating the chairmanship for each meeting. The advantage here is that no one service dominates the group nor is one service providing all the resources. It also fits the model that in a community we need all the services and they all are important. Shared responsibility may also foster a climate of open discussion and problem-solving. This approach can work well where most of the participants are committed and available. It also makes it easier for the chairman to act as host, discussion leader and provide recording services. However, there can also be disadvantages to this approach. Records are not kept in one place, confusion can more easily result regarding time and place of future meetings, and there can be a lack of consistency and follow-through regarding decision making.

Another approach is to have the meeting location vary but have a single service agency provide the leadership and recording for a longer period, say one year. This approach can avoid the disadvantages associated with the chair rotating every month or so. The key is to assure that the agency assuming the chairmanship role is interested, and has a history of good organization and follow-through.



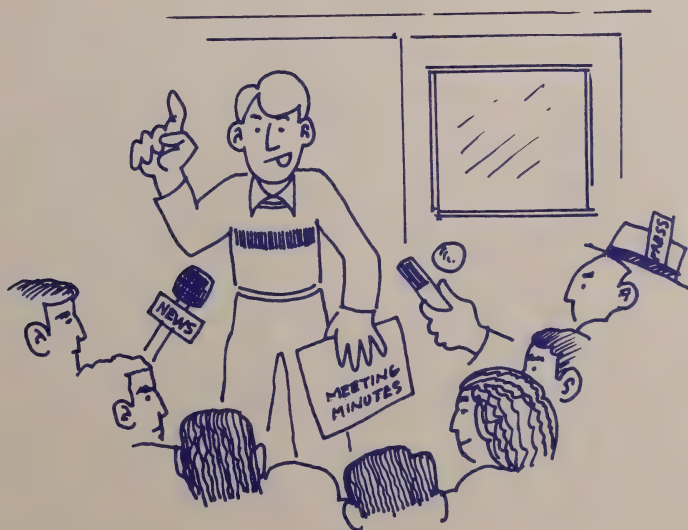
# *What about agendas, minutes, public statements?*

It is good practice for the group to have an agenda established and distributed prior to each meeting. If any background reading is required, this should accompany the agenda.

One area that creates a great deal of frustration is minutes — recording, editing, reading and reviewing. Early in the co-ordination group's history, members should clearly establish their view of minutes and how minutes relate to their goals. Minutes should be brief and they should contain a summary of decisions made/actions to be taken. They should not attempt to describe the entire discussion that has taken place on any subject. Remember the goal is to encourage free discussion around sensitive service issues. Also, each member of the group has limited authority and is responsible to people who are not present at the meeting.

Minutes and other written documents have a way of getting around. They are read by others who do not have the context of discussion. Negative statements about a service may not be well received by other staff in and out of the community. Once something is written on paper it has a life of its own. Correcting misunderstandings can absorb a great deal of energy.

When the co-ordinating group has a public statement it wishes to make, it is best to deliberately draft the statement and then have it endorsed by all the members who agree with it. If it is a research-type report, documenting a need or a problem situation, again it should be deliberately drafted and those involved should identify their participation. Your final copy should be approved by the group. If time is short then make sure that each member is aware that the edited draft is their last "kick at the cat" and have at least one other member, other than the writer(s), look over the material before it is released.



# *How do you communicate?*

Communication is a two-way street. You take information in; you give information out. You listen, you reflect, you share ideas. You need to attend the interagency co-ordination meetings with a set of personal communication skills which should be employed to their fullest. But how do you communicate as a group?



Here are some ways to communicate as a group:

Workshops	Bring together interested persons for a short period of intensive study on a subject of particular interest to your community.
Seminars	Small and organized to the "instructional" pattern; usually only one or two topics are covered.
Information Fair	This is a trade-fair type of event with display booths, tables, etc., open to the general public.
Listening Booth	A kiosk at a shopping centre or another public place where citizens can express themselves on community issues.



Tabloid/ Newsletter	Community/interagency news posted in public places or circulated to citizens.
Data Bank	A central file or library where statistical and informative community/interagency data is kept.
Regular Newspaper Columns	Short informative articles on the interagency, community issues or a particular service in the community.
Community Impact Assessment	A systematic research review of change in your community. If you are interested, the Northern Alberta Development Council has published a handbook which will help you.
Community Self-Survey	A questionnaire or other survey of the citizens in the community, prepared, carried out and analyzed by a local group.



## *How do you maintain confidentiality?*

No issue causes more concern or debate than that of client confidentiality. Usually all member agencies of a community co-ordinating group have different definitions and policies regarding the handling of client or agency information. Some agencies are actually bound by law and require staff to sign oaths regarding confidentiality. Early in the co-ordination group's history all laws, practices and policies respecting client confidentiality should be made clear. **Ground rules must be explicitly established.** The group then will have to deal with agenda items in light of these understandings.

Confidentiality can be an issue when group discussions occur. To be of value, group discussions often need to be open and direct. It is important that the group have an agreement on the type of information members present and what can be done with it. How shall names be used in group discussions? Who outside the group can be told what? On the other hand, the confidentiality "issue" should not be a mask or an excuse not to participate in a co-ordination group. Information on any person or client discussed in professional, confidential group sessions must never be passed on to others outside of the meeting.



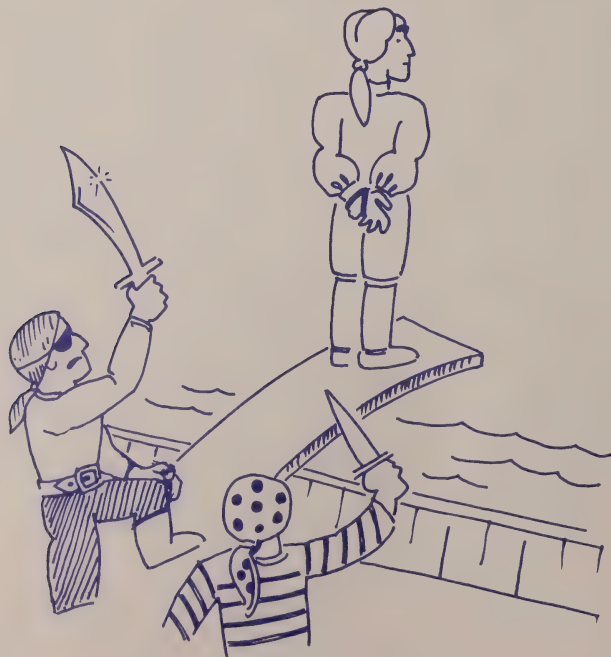
*Rules of thumb for confidentiality:*

- *Establish your ground rules on reporting interagency business to the community and public-at-large.*
- *Recorded motions may show a "mover" and a "second" but no other names people or agencies should be recorded that indicate a position on an argument or a source of information.*
- *Case conferences should only include those service representatives with a direct service relationship with the client.*
- *Case conferences/client discussions with co-ordinating agencies are not to be part of the co-ordinating group's records.*
- *Prepare public statements carefully and as a group.*
- *Individual members should not release information on interagency discussions to the media unless they are assured it is non-confidential or it has been cleared by the group.*
- *The group needs to develop a media policy but in no situation should the group seek to represent any individual service.*
- *When in doubt, treat the matter as confidential.*

## *What do you do about obstructionism, incompetence and unethical behaviour?*

Every group must deal with internal disagreement at some time or another. For example, what can a co-ordinating group do if a member refuses to examine a well-documented issue? What can the group do if members violate their agreements? What if it becomes apparent that particular members do not have the ability or will not carry out their work commitments? What if there are strong personality clashes which jeopardize the group's ability to function? These issues can arise and sometimes cannot be avoided. Within formal agencies there are procedures to deal with these issues. Can there be such procedures in a voluntary, co-ordination group?

While some of these issues can be dealt with in a formal way, most will likely have to be addressed informally. Participants will need to develop a relationship that permits these issues to be addressed. It is important to use tact in bringing the matter forward. A quiet get together or phone call between a group delegate and the individual agency will usually resolve the matter. Even though member services ultimately will have to determine their own response to the behaviour of their particular representatives, the group can nevertheless confront the individual or agency involved during an actual meeting. Of course, such confrontation should be done in a constructive, objective manner, and only when informal methods and approaches have failed.



If the issue cannot be resolved internally by persuasion, the group may consider formally reporting the individual or the agency to more senior management of the particular agency in question. The official chain of command should be followed when reporting local, regional and then provincial authorities. Such reporting should only be done as a last resort in very serious cases. You run the risk of offending the supervisor when you criticize a staff member's behaviour. Since yours is a voluntary group do not be surprised if the agency pulls out.

If a co-ordinating group's energies become too involved in removing people, the group risks the danger of being perceived as a control agency rather than a co-ordination one. However, by not responding to serious issues, the group risks being seen as incompetent and unable to deal with real situations.



# What are the common causes of failure?

Below is a list of common reasons associated with the failure of interagency co-ordination groups. The list also indicates some suggested solutions. Some of the difficulties that must be overcome are, of course, largely out of the control of any one service or community.

## *The Common Causes of Failure:*

- *High personnel turnover ("new staff in an agency"):*

*People changing jobs or leaving the community is a fact of life in many northern communities. You may want to develop an orientation package of information and delegate a member as the "welcomer" to ease the newcomer into the service community and into the interagency group. Follow-up contacts individually and as a group.*

- *Little or no turnover ("old boys club"):*

*One agenda item, once a year, should be to re-assess your purpose, goals and objectives and your individual commitment. Determine also if your membership is adequate; should some members drop off? should new members join? Do not be afraid to re-assemble as a new group with a new purpose, if you agree the old mandate has been completed.*

- *Boring, long meetings without action ("the group is dead"):*

*Change your chairperson or add new members to your group. Determine if information exchange is productive or if it takes place by rote. Assess if the agencies are really contributing "important" information or are they playing games? Assess your chairmanship system; if it rotates too often it could affect performance.*

- *New people at every meeting ("you go in my place"):*

*Contact the official agency representative to determine the problem. Periodically assess the performance of the group. Organize and structure the meetings so that people will realize they really missed something.*

- *Lack of genuine issues ('we meet to meet'):*

*Raise the issue with the group. Suggest areas and issues they could be addressing. Possibly meet less regularly and for a shorter time period. Use the sub-committee approach to review outstanding community issues which could serve as a basis for new objectives and goals.*

- *Lack of committed members ('nobody cares'):*

*Break into a smaller group and change the meeting style or approach; become more task-oriented if you can. Contact each dissatisfied member to determine what is causing the problem. Appoint a task-oriented individual to assume this responsibility. Periodically evaluate the performance of the group. Choose an important short-term task which will demonstrate the group's relevance and credibility.*

- *Authoritarian control methods ('this is someone's show'):*

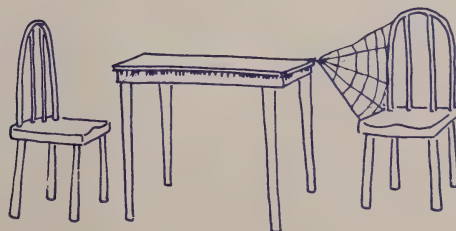
*Change your chairperson; put someone in who is also a facilitator. Periodically have an evaluation made of the group's performance. Suggest use of sub-committees to work on specific tasks.*

- *Personality clashes ('it is just one fight after another'):*

*Try to find a friend of both parties who can mediate the differences in a private session. Confront the people involved during a group session if the private approach did not work.*

- *Lack of agency support ('my agency is not interested'):*

*Try to contact other staff from the same agency to see if they can encourage participation. Have the interagency group formally request participation, citing all the reasons why their involvement is important. Two or three member agencies could approach the local office together.*



# *What can be accomplished?*

An effective interagency co-ordination group encourages member services and their staff to see their work as it relates to the “whole” client, the “whole” network of services and the “whole” community. A co-ordination group encourages a focus on the total individual and the community as distinct from their own individual agency and the parent organization.

The group can also assist in helping service personnel to better understand each other’s unique role. It can serve to open up lines of communication on a personal basis and so facilitate a close working relationship.

It can assist in a reduction of overlapping services and filling in overlooked gaps. No matter how carefully a comprehensive service network is designed on paper, some people and some situations are missed.

It can assist the community by providing a forum for dealing with misunderstanding and abuse. These may arise from a particular service or staff member, or from a particular client. The human service field often deals with stressful situations and it is easy for misunderstandings and abuses to arise.

It can provide service staff with mutual support and a forum to deal with some of their on-going work concerns. Different views of quality service, treatment, job-related stress, confidentiality and success measurements can be aired in a supportive atmosphere. This is particularly important in situations where service workers either work alone or in isolation from other agencies.

Co-ordinating groups can help new workers become oriented to other services and their community. It can help them feel a part of the wider human services community. Interagencies can sponsor up-to-date in-service training. Such training can be particularly effective because several local agencies participate and make sure the information provided is applicable to community needs.

It can make your job easier and more successful.





## *What is the basis of success?*

When we closely analyze any human activity, we are often overwhelmed with the complexity involved. If we thought in detail about everything that is involved in organizing community services, we probably would not enter into these activities. The point is, we believe in certain things and we act. Often, we and our community succeed in reaching a goal and are amazed that we were able to overcome many obstacles. Sometimes we fail but we still keep on trying. We succeed often enough — or believe enough in the merits of trying — to keep tackling seemingly impossible, never-ending problems.

It is a similar situation with interagency co-ordination. Interagency co-ordination is a seemingly impossible task which can fail for many good reasons, but it is needed and you must believe that it can happen. Service personnel know that interagency co-operation and co-ordination are vital. It can happen in your community. In spite of all the complexities involved, people can join together, can agree and can create better understanding and delivery between various services. The client and the community can be served better.

Success then is associated with both positive attitudes and hard work. But success is also closely linked with credibility. Most people believe that credibility is increased through the character of the leaders involved and the results obtained through action. Once people know that a group listens, studies and acts to improve service, they tend to give the group more support.



The basis of success is being moved to act, believing it can happen and making it happen.

## *The last word ...*

... is yours. If you have any ideas or experiences to share about interagency co-ordination, any questions, comments or requests, please contact:

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Postal Bag 900-14  
PEACE RIVER, Alberta  
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# *Appendix*





## *Goal setting*

Goal setting is actually a process which has four dependent parts:

- 1) Purpose      A broad, general expression of intent. For example, your purpose might be to co-ordinate the activities of social services in your community.
  
- 2) Objectives      The aim or object of your intent. Objectives are more specific than purpose and they are defined as verbs; i.e., to be, to make, etc. Possible objectives for an interagency co-ordination group were discussed earlier on page 14 in this handbook.
  
- 3) Goals      These are real and observable. Goals are more specific than objectives and they can be measured. For each objective there are a set of prioritized goals, each with a deadline. For example, if your objective is to discuss issues of mutual concern then your goals could be:
  - to meet every second Monday of the month at noon;
  - to hold a workshop on the value of interagency co-ordination by year end.
  
- 4) Strategies      This is your plan of action that sets up the steps to achieve each goal. Each strategy must answer the 5 Ws (who, what, where; why and when).

## *Four essentials of an effective meeting*

*A meeting is a superior and unique tool for receiving ideas and affecting a group of individuals. Meetings can accomplish goals that usually cannot be achieved in any other way. There is an ancient, natural and inherent need for people to gather in groups. People feel better when they share problems, needs, hopes and fears. There is a special creative force that a meeting can exude, a sharing of experience and the formation of a "new society" which provides a comfort and security level that makes learning easier (from a manual on "Meeting Skills").*

Some of the points below are familiar to you. You often employ them when you meet. In formal, strict settings these points are followed religiously and in detail. They are the "rules of order" that direct the business of the meeting.

At interagency co-ordination meetings you will not be so regimented. However, you should be familiar with the essentials of an effective meeting so you know when and how to apply them for your situation.

### **1. Leadership — Being an effective chairman**

Good leadership is an art with its own complete set of skills. The skills can be learned but it takes a concentrated effort. You will know the leaders of your group; they tend to emerge because of their credibility and organizational strengths.

No matter how formal your organization, the leader is a co-member with a special job to do. Chairpersons should grasp and interpret the sense of the meeting, give tactful leadership, keep order, provide an opportunity for all points of view to be expressed and see that basic rules of procedure are followed. The purpose of rules is to guide and, if necessary, to limit the discussion, but care should be taken to avoid any arbitrary application of rigid enforcement of rules of procedure. Firmness, courtesy, tact, impartiality and willingness to give everyone an opportunity to express himself or herself on the subject under consideration are qualifications essential to good chairmanship.

### **2. Planning — Preparing for results**

There are five steps your meeting will go through if it is to be effective:

- a) Plan
  - Ask: "Why a meeting? Is there an alternative?"
  - Find out the agenda items in advance
  - Determine the main tasks to be completed.



- b) Inform
- Set agenda: meeting priorities and follow-up for priorities
  - Set approximate time limits for each item according to its importance
  - Prepare an agenda
  - Prepare an explanation of:
    - reason for meeting
    - reason for topics to be discussed
    - who should attend
  - Send agenda and resource material to members in advance. Let them know what to bring to a meeting.
- c) Process
- At the meeting, for each item, members should:
    - state the issue      } identifying the
    - provide evidence    } problem
    - debate issue/interpret evidence
    - propose alternative solutions
    - decide on an action
- d) Summarize and Record
- Summarize decisions at meeting end
  - Make sure that someone should agree to follow-up major business.
- e) Evaluation
- Go back over the agenda and ensure that all business was covered and decisions reached
  - Feedback on meeting.

### 3. The Agenda — Organizing your meetings

The agenda is a guide and it is structured to ensure a clear start, ordered business and a definite end.

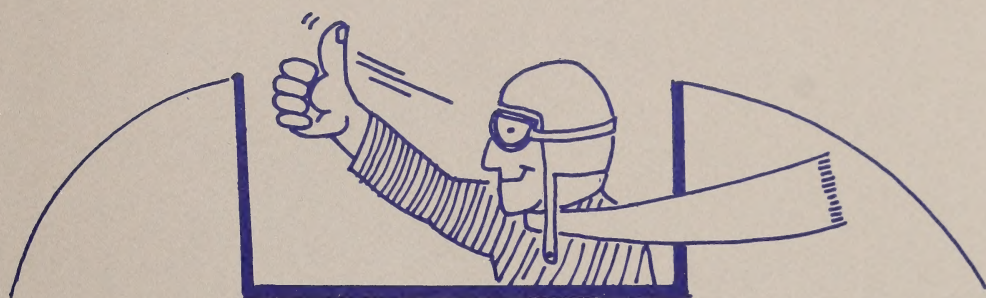
The order for your agenda should be:

- Name of meeting/group
- Date
- Time
- Place
- Meeting purpose
- Call to order
- Adoption/Review of past minutes
- Business arising from past minutes
- Financial accounts approval (if necessary)
- Committee/sub-group reports (if necessary)
- Correspondence (if necessary)
- New business
- Next meeting
- Adjournment (include time)

### 4. The Minutes — Recording your results

Your minutes should essentially show:

- Group name
- Type of meeting
- Date, location of meeting
- Names of members and guests present
- Commencement time (call to order)
- Approval/disapproval of minutes from the last meeting (note errors or omissions)
- Main discussion points on specific agenda items including conflicting opinions (briefly stated and without names)
- Motions or decisions (naming movers, seconders, opposers and abstainers is optional)
- Date of next meeting
- Adjournment time











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